

## Quincy Jones: A Life Less Ordinary Part One By Kathy Iandoli

How do you spell legend? With just one letter: Q. Quincy Delight Jones Jr. is a man who for the past six decades has carved a path so strong in the music industry, that his footprints were deep enough for others to follow. As Michael Jackson's *Thriller* just celebrated its 25th Anniversary (December 1), it brings to light an important fact that there haven't been many artists or albums that in some way weren't touched by Mr. Quincy Jones.

From Frank Sinatra to Tupac Shakur, Quincy Jones makes music with no boundaries – as standalone singles, projects, or Hip-Hop samples. It's no wonder why Astronaut Leland Melvin has chosen Jones' 1969 classic "Walking In Space" as his song choice for waking up in space. The talents of Quincy Jones have awakened us all, and it was the greatest honor imaginable to have this living legend sit down and discuss his running history with us.

As someone whose body of work competes with his number of frequent flyer miles, Quincy enjoys traveling the world as a philanthropist just as much as he enjoys making records. His latest venture *Star Camp* with his son Quincy III and Nick Cannon brings state-of-the-art technology to shaping young creative minds with the gifts of singing, dancing, and rapping. In addition, there are new album projects coming soon. His mantra of worldwide betterment through music is one that we should all be driven enough to maintain. But it's all in a day's work, or as Quincy puts it, "global gumbo."

AllHipHop.com Alternatives: Mr. Quincy Jones, it's such an honor to be speaking with you.

Quincy Jones: Why thank you, honey, where are you?

AHHA: I'm in New York...well, sort of. I'm in New Jersey.

Quincy Jones: [laughs] That's the country.

AHHA: Yes, I'm actually camping right now. [laughs]

Quincy Jones: [laughs] They used to have that old joke way back in the day. A Southern brother came up from Florida dying to get to New York, and he got to Newark, and the conductor said, "New Ark!" He jumped off and in three years he got to New York. [laughs]

AHHA: What did Woody Allen say? Anytime you're outside of New York, you're camping.

Quincy Jones: That's right! [laughs] You're camping, huh.

AHHA: That's right.

Quincy Jones: God bless ya, honey.

AHHA: So how are you today?

Quincy Jones: Okay, just lots of stuff to do as usual.

AHHA: Well first, congratulations on being honored by the Grammy's...

Quincy Jones: Thank you. Fifty years ago, we're sitting around the room saying, "Maybe it would be a good idea to have a record academy." And we've got one. It's amazing.

AHHA: Also, congratulations on *Star Camp*. Your son [QD3] sent us the link and it looks amazing.

Quincy Jones: It is the most moving, wait until you see it. [The kids] are so talented, honey, and committed. We've really chosen the right eight kids for the right reasons. They have this mission; they've got their goals in sight. So much passion behind it, and insight. One girl – she's a singer, I couldn't believe it – said she likes all those singers from back in the day, the '40s and all.

That really impresses me, because it means they're into the legacy and all. Really incredible singers, dancers, rappers and everything. [*Star Camp*] really gives them a goal to get into a [career] that they can spend the rest of their lives depending on. Being creative, it's wonderful. I mean really, really wonderful. I was more than moved, I was touched you know? They're young too. One of them is 13 years old and says, "I want to be a role model." [I said], "Well that's a big commitment, you know? You have to act like one." A lot of the old ones out there don't know how to do that. [laughs]

**AHHA: What is it like working so closely with your son [QD3] on this project?**

**Quincy Jones: That's the biggest thrill of all. My son has been a professional for a long time, and we've done a lot of things together, but we're getting more and more into television production and DVDs. He has a great DVD company. I just got the rights to a movie we're gonna do together – a big movie about the Black gangsters. It's called *The Policy Kings*. Those were the Jones boys my daddy worked for in Chicago when I was a kid. They were no joke, honey. No joke.**

AHHA: I'm Italian, so I can only imagine...

Quincy Jones: You're Italian. You know what's up then. [laughs]

AHHA: Italian from New Jersey.

Quincy Jones: That's right. I know all those Jersey boys. Pesci was here the other day. Joe Pesci, he's from Jersey. So are [Jack] Nicholson, [John] Travolta. Those are all my dogs. I've been around Pesci or even Jack before they happened.

Before [Jack Nicholson] did *Easy Rider*. Joe Pesci, we're gonna produce his next album, singing. He's brilliant. Oh boy he's brilliant. I've worked with the best and he is no joke. He is fantastic.

AHHA: And of course, you've worked with Michael Jackson...

Quincy Jones: Everybody [laughs] – Ella [Fitzgerald], [Count] Basie, Duke [Ellington], Louis Armstrong, Ray Charles,

Sinatra, Paul Simon, Tony Bennett, Aretha Franklin, Dinah Washington, Nina Simone, Michael Jackson, rappers – two dozen rappers. [laughs] Ice-T, Melle Mel, Kool Moe Dee. Everybody. Just amazing. I look back sometimes and say, “How did that happen?” But it’s been 60 years, you know?

AHHA: I remember you were rapping with Melle Mel on stage at the *Arsenio Hall Show*.

Quincy Jones: That’s right! I remember when Arsenio first came out here [LA]. He was in a show down at the Roxy – opening act. He came out, and they announced him as one Pip that left Gladys Knight. [laughs] He was doing all of those background dances, and then would go up to the mic and say, “Roo Roo!” [laughs] Greatest act I ever saw in my life. That’s a brother from Cleveland.

AHHA: I know there has been talk of a Michael Jackson comeback record. Would you have any hand in the production of that?

Quincy Jones: Nobody’s told me about that or anything like that. Number one, we’re so overextended, but no nobody’s even talked to me about it. I saw it in the Post too about [working with] Whitney [Houston] and Michael. It’s not true! Nobody called me about that. With my international foundation work, which is extensive in Cambodia, Brazil, Kidali, South Africa, it’s so much time. That’s my real passion, my foundation. We’re working with Harvard now and with the International Development Fund and Inter-American Development Fund for Katrina and Latin America. We’re going down [to New Orleans] in February to film with Brett Ratner. It’s just wonderful.

AHHA: That’s phenomenal. Rumor has it you’re also going to be working with the Olympics...

Quincy Jones: Yes in Beijing, but before that I wrote the theme for the Special Olympics. It’s exciting. We’ve been busy, busy, busy. I like being busy. Especially if it’s something you’re passionate about. These kids to me are number one because they symbolize the future of the country in reaching out to other countries and having allies that love each other. I spend a lot of time traveling so I know the territory backwards for 54 years. Our problem is we have 11% of Americans that have passports and only 6% use them. We don’t know what’s going on outside of this country. I just advise young people – no matter how you do it, with backpacks or whatever – to travel. Jamaica and Saint Barts don’t count. [laughs] I’m serious, the Bahamas doesn’t count. I’m talking about getting over there where stuff is going on. Go to Croatia. Travel around, go to Cairo, Kidali.

AHHA: Definitely.

Quincy Jones: You’re Italian. Do you speak Italian?

AHHA: You know what’s funny...I speak more Spanish than I do Italian.

Quincy Jones: More Spanish? Really? You’ve got a little ghetto goin’ there too. I like that. [laughs] I call that the “global gumbo.” That’s where we’re going to go with our kids, teaching them how to be producers, writers, and singers and actors, etc. to fill their lives. Then we’re going to interface them with kids like the Coconut Kids of Cambodia and everywhere else so that they can introduce other kids to the rest of the world. I think it’s very important. Do you travel much?

AHHA: I try to. It’s hard with school and work.

Quincy Jones: How old are you?

AHHA: I’m 28.

Quincy Jones: You sound like you’re 14. [laughs] That’s very nice. I have six daughters of my own you know...

AHHA: Yes, I know. I watched *The Office*.

Quincy Jones: Then you know Rashida!

AHHA: Yes and I know Aaliyah, God rest her soul, was very good friends with your daughter Kidada.

Quincy Jones: Aaliyah used to stay at my house; she was like one of my daughters. I love that little girl. I have her picture right on my desk. Just love her.

AHHA: You also knew the late Tupac Shakur was quite well...

Quincy Jones: All of them. You know, personally I’ve lost 97 friends in a year and a half. It was really heavy. The ones Aaliyah’s age and Tupac’s and Biggie’s...it’s just terrifying.

AHHA: In your book *Q*, there’s a point where Kidada was speaking about Tupac making some comments about your family, and then later apologizing. Then Tupac had to sit down and meet you and talk to you one day when he and Kidada were at a deli. What was that like when you were sitting down in that deli and you told him you had to come speak to him?

Quincy Jones: What happened was he said something, I think it was in the Source. He dissed me about my kids being mixed. I don’t like that and neither does my son. [laughs] So I was going to Jerry’s Deli one night and I was dropping Rashida off, and lo and behold there’s Tupac sittin’ in the booth with Kidada. Like an idiot, I jump over to the back of him and put both hands on his shoulders and yelled, “HA!” Thank God he wasn’t packin’ and all. [laughs]

AHHA: Oh my goodness!

Quincy Jones: Anyway, I wasn’t worried about that. I was raised in Chicago, honey. Are you kidding? That’s the OG ghetto. So I said, “Pac we have to talk a minute. We went over and sat down.” He had written an apology before that, so that was out of the way because he apologized. At that point, I could tell he was falling in love with my daughter and she was in love with him. So we sat down, and he was so beautiful. We became really good friends after that day. He said he didn’t even have that kind of relationship with his own father – that somebody cared about his future and all that stuff. We became very good friends. At one point I was gonna do *Pimp* with him and Snoop Dogg, the film. We used to talk on the phone, [Tupac] was very excited about it. Then after a series of events, we lost a very young brother. Very brilliant. I came to know him through the letters he wrote to Kidada. Brilliant writer. Jada Pinkett Smith told me she went to high school with him in Baltimore and he was an A student.

With screenplays and everything; a lot of that other stuff was psychodrama, just trying to be a gangster. But he was a very bright kid. In fact, I was very proud that we inadvertently shared one of his biggest records, "How Do U Want It?" he used my sample from "Body Heat" on that. There was some kind of divine connection there, but my daughter was responsible for us hookin' up.

AHHA: When the *Vibe* cover with Tupac and Biggie was released...

Quincy Jones: The magazines, they imitate life. [Magazines aren't] the cause, they're the effect. We had summits at my magazine *Vibe* at the time, we had Colin Powell, Flava Flav, everybody, we had real private summits to keep [violence in Hip-Hop] from happening. I remember Colin Powell asking for two hours to come up, and he ended up staying for five hours. It was heavy, and Biggie was there, Public Enemy, everyone was there. We've always been connected as a community, and always will be. I think that Hip-Hop can be so vital in revolutionizing education. I really do. Peace is hard, but keep the knowledge. Drop the knowledge. The young kids need it now too.

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## Quincy Jones: A Life Less Ordinary Part Two

AHHA: You really witnessed Hip-Hop in its infantile stages.

Quincy Jones: Oh yeah, well there's always been spoken word in Black music. We have a major legacy and heritage and evolution, and the more [Hip-Hop] gets to know where it comes from, the easier it can know where it's going. We were talking to the kids from Star Camp and they really understand that. They paid their dues too, they had some rough times in their lives.

AHHA: Did you have any idea when you were witnessing the birth of Hip-Hop that it had that staying power?

Quincy Jones: Oh yeah, always knew it. I've been around since '47 with Bebop. Bebop is so much like Hip-Hop it's unbelievable. In fact, most of the words [Hip-Hop] uses comes from Bebop and they don't even know it. Like "homeboy" and "cribs" are you kiddin'? In a way, Bebop started it. They were freestyling and Hip-Hop was always about jammin' and free forms of improvisation all the time. It is right in the same church as far as I'm concerned. The attitude sociologically was just about the same.

Bebop was premature and didn't have the kind of power – you didn't have as big a media either to put it all out there. You have the biggest media in the history of the world out now, with online and fiber optics and satellite radio. You didn't have that back then. We didn't even have televisions in '47. It was just radio. Not trying to compare [Bebop and Hip-Hop], but it's the same sensibility. They have their own colloquialisms, body language, or gestures. The same thing Malcolm X comes out of or Miles Davis. It's interesting to see it all put together.

AHHA: When you were working at Mercury in the '60s compared to now, do you see as much passion in the music executives now as opposed to then?

Quincy Jones: No. The focus was much more on the sound rather than the businessman back in those days. We were in the process of originating a lot of styles, so people didn't even know how to make a business out of it. They were trying to discover it, that's why there was a lot of exploitation going on. People were discovering new genres. Take this one guy for instance, Morris Levy – who started Birdland – here's a guy who was working with a gangster family, Genovese family. After he had Bop City with Bebop, Charlie Parker, he and Alan Freed copyrighted Rock and Roll a few years later; then they had K.C. and the Sunshine Band with Disco. Each genre, they were at the forefront because the gangsters ran the booking agents and the record companies. Most of them outside of the majors; we had five majors, but the rest of them were all gangsters. Then they came in with Sugar Hill Gang "Rappers Delight." That's four genres right there, four major genres from Bebop to Rock and Roll to Disco to Hip-Hop you know? With each, you'd see a step in the evolution right before your eyes. It was very natural for us, because when we started, we didn't care about the money or the fame. We couldn't care less.

AHHA: What do you think it would take for the labels to get that back?

Quincy Jones: Honey, I don't know if it's going to get back. We have to do something different. Most people are in denial, acting like nothing's wrong. There's something terribly wrong, and it's not the passion in the music, people love the music. [The labels] are making discriminatory choices, like just one or two songs out of the CD, which is strange because I've always been the kind of producer that made a whole experience out of the CD.

That's what's going on, but the distribution platform is flawed because they're handing them smoking guns because DVDs and CDs are masters. And binary numbers go back to 3500 B.C. in Egypt, that's not new, but the application is like putting a smoking gun in the users' hands because they have all of the technology – they can do anything they want. One generation doesn't even know we have to pay for music. That's very dangerous because songwriters, musicians, and producers have to send their kids to school too. We have to figure out how to make it work. I don't know what it is – advertisements, sponsors?

Everybody is trying to figure it out now. They have to figure it out because it's in trouble...big trouble. I've been around the world three times this year from Cambodia to Vietnam to China, Latin America, Cairo, and I see it. Billions of records and intellectual property being taken...movies too. I was outside of the Beijing University, and they were selling DVDs for a dollar a piece.

In my speech I said, "You know, one day five years from now, there could be a Ling Hau Chau that could be a Steven Spielberg or a Stevie Wonder and he won't get paid either." That's how it works, there's both sides and we have to make it a win-win situation. If you take everybody else's stuff, they'll take yours. Somehow it always works out, honey. I think there's probably going to be a change in the revenue, well a shift coming from a different place other than the consumer. I don't know, that's the way it looks to me. Nobody really has a solution yet, but everyone's trying to find it. There's probably going to be some things we never imagined. We'll see. I wish I did know the answer.

AHHA: How do you feel the role of the producer has changed, or evolved since Hip-Hop?

Quincy Jones: Honey, I come from the old school with big bands and doing it all acoustically. I went through every phase, from 78 discs, tapes, analogs – you name it – digital, been through all of it. I think that the more the technology improves, it gives musicians a bigger reason to be lazy about their – I should say – "worship" of music in terms of preparing themselves as great musicians. The technology sometimes doesn't demand much musicianship. The technology does the work for you. I'd rather take the music from God rather than the electricity, and I was the first one to use the synthesizer and the bass.

1953, you know, without the synth or the bass there would be no Rock and Roll, no Motown, nothing. That's the way it is.

AHHA: Who are some of the producers today that you enjoy?

Quincy Jones: Oh a lot of them – Will.I.Am, Akon, Timbaland, and Dr. Dre has always been on top of my list. Pharrell, all those guys dating back to Teddy Riley, Jermaine Dupri, Dallas [Austin], all of them.

AHHA: In terms of artists, if you could do another Back On the Block compilation, who would you have on it?

Quincy Jones: I don't know. [laughs] I'd have to be in the process to know, but I promise you soon I'll be doing something like that.

AHHA: Who are some artists you enjoy these days?

Quincy Jones: Everybody! I see the same ones you see – Chris Brown, T.I. – we see the same people, but [I see them] on a much broader basis because I go to Brazil and I hear Hip-Hop people, in China, Korea, all over the world. Even the rappers doing it locally in urban cities, like Louisiana, the songs of the Dirty South, everywhere you go, because it's connected to a lifestyle and a life force. It's strong; it's a body movement, it's an attitude, it's an expression. It's beautiful.

AHHA: People say that overseas, the people feel the Hip-Hop more nowadays. Do you agree with that?

Quincy Jones: Absolutely. Not only that, they got into it before we got into it. Europe has a culture – that's why I went to France when I was young – they have much more of an artistic appreciation for what everybody's doing. It comes from an older culture. We don't have that, but we will hopefully if the educational system gets off its butt and lets us have a soul, because if we have a soul then we won't have anymore Columbine [situations]. I really believe that.

AHHA: Is there any particular candidate for President that you're supporting?

Quincy Jones: Yes, I'm working with Hillary [Clinton]. I believe in Obama a lot; I think in the future he's going to be an incredible person, but I've been working with the Clintons for so long producing the inauguration, millennium, I know who they are. We need an amazing winner on an international basis, and I think that comes with Hillary and Bill's legacy.

AHHA: What advice would you give to an unsigned artist or a kid who's interning at a record label right now?

Quincy Jones: Where do we have a record business? [laughs] Keep on getting better as a musician; people find things online. Keep experimenting because nobody has successfully done it yet or found a way to get their close relationship between the listener and creator. I see it getting closer and closer, and that's not bad.

AHHA: Why was the music industry so slow in embracing technology?

Quincy Jones: That was my whole point, I've been [using technology] for 28 years and they act like it wasn't there. The binary numbers have been around for a long time, but it's about not paying attention that's all. I kid the people when I go to Egypt. Egypt is the foundation of civilization and a 3,000-year empire. They did everything – medicine, hieroglyphics, binary numbers, everything, first before anyone on the planet.

We were on the Nile one night and I was kidding one of the guys. I said, "What happened? Didn't you guys believe in electricity?" because the British came along with gun powder from China, and the Industrial Revolution took a third of the world. They figured it out. It's what we have to do now – figure it out. I put my whole life into [music]. I can't do anything else.

AHHA: You do things everyday for this industry, and it's amazing what you've done and continue to do...

Quincy Jones: Well I try, honey. I try to do all that I need to do here. I can't drive a car, but I know how to do other things.

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